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ABSTRACT

One of 52 theoretical papers on school crime and its relation to poverty, this chapter examines rebellion against authority in high school from the perspective of school status theories. Extending such theories beyond concern with the immediate response to academic status and structural inequality, this paper addresses the broader issue of legitimacy of authority in high school. Using data from a statewide sample of 3,100 adolescents in Illinois the paper also examines the process of peer support for rebellious behavior. (Author/MLF)

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REBELLION AGAINST AUTHORITY IN HIGH SCHOOLS*‡

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ABSTRACT

Rebellion against authority in high school is examined from the perspective of school status theories. Extending such theories beyond concern with the immediate response to academic status and structural inequality, this paper addresses the broader issue of legitimacy of authority in high school. Using data from a statewide sample of 3,100 adolescents in Illinois the paper also examines the process of peer support for rebellious behavior.

Introduction

School is the major arena of adolescent life. Within the boundaries of the school a youngster's victories and defeats take on a public character. School is also a youngster's first real encounter with impersonal authority and the testing of independence. The relationship between a youngster and the school can indicate how that individual reacts to authority as well as determine the content of and his position in the peer group. Thus, school has remained a prime focus of those who would attempt to explain delinquent behavior. Youngsters who are able to succeed in school are more often than not able to succeed outside the school as well.

Currently, the largest and most popular range of explanations which connect the school to delinquent and rebellious behavior are the school status theories. This general perspective is associated with the work of Polk, Schafer, Kelly, Pink, and Frease, among others. The present paper extends school status theories in two ways. First, it utilizes literature on authority and political socialization to address the more basic question of why youngsters grant legitimacy to school authorities. Second, it extends present knowledge about peer support for rebellious behavior, using data from a statewide sample of adolescents in Illinois. The way in which youngsters come to attribute responsibility for low status to the school is examined. The result is an articulation of the way in which the peer group influences rule-breaking behavior, as well as some indication of the type and seriousness of such behavior.

School Status Theories

The experiences of a youngster in school are extremely important not only because education is the primary vehicle of self-advancement but because such experiences determine an adolescent's status both academically and socially. The most general statement of school status theories is that youngsters respond to their low position in the status hierarchy of the school by engaging in rule-violating behavior. If this sounds vaguely familiar, it should, since it is a descendent of the work of Cohen (1955) and of Cloward and Ohlin (1960), who attributed delinquency to blocked goal attainment.

The difference between the two perspectives is that school status theories are much broader, aiming to explain delinquent behavior in a wider population than that of lower- or working-class boys. The contemporary theories also connect school status to delinquency even when controlling for social class differences. The idea which is receiving increasing support is that it is not what class background a youngster comes from but rather how he is situated in the school that determines the likelihood of norm-violating behavior. This general position has been reaffirmed in a number of studies (Kelly, 1974; Polk, Frease, & Richmond, 1974; Call, 1965; Kelly & Pink, 1975; Rhodes & Reiss, 1969).

What makes this perspective so broad in scope is that a younster's status in school can be interpreted in a number of ways. In the most obvious sense, it refers to school performance in terms of grades. Youngsters who experience failure in school are much more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. A youngster's social status or prestige in school is also related to academic success or failure. Students who do poorly in school are not only subjected to the stigma of low grades; they are also denied access to a wide variety of privileges and opportunities. Schools set minimum academic standards for participation in clubs, sports, student government, and other extracurricular activities. Even where there are no procedural barriers, there are often social barriers to participation in these activities because their membership is largely composed of youngsters of high academic performance. (Athletics, however, have remained a notable exception to this and have traditionally acted as a status elevator for youngsters.) Because grades are closely tied to the distribution of status-conferring activities, poor performance has a broad impact on a youngster's school experience. The youngster whose academic performance is low is also isolated from a variety of positive experiences in the school. As Vinter and Sarri (1965) put it, "The linking of secondary rewards and sanctions to grades may result in far more than reinforcement of academic criteria since it denies the poor performer legitimate alternative opportunities for recognition and success" (p.9).

Tracking

Another application of school status is in terms of an adolescent's position in the structure of school. By this I mean primarily tracking. There are two kinds of tracking used in high schools: ability tracking, where classroom composition is based on students' personal qualities or performances, and curriculum tracking, where classrooms are divided on the basis of aspirations or ambitions. Both kinds of tracking create invidious distinctions among students. The result is that lower status in the social structure of the school accrues to youngsters in lower ability groups and in vocational or general rather than college preparatory curricula. Two studies of tracking (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963; Rosenbaum, 1976) have pointed to the rather dubious criteria upon which track assignments are made and the permanent consequences of such decisions. Regarding the importance of track position in the allocation of status, Rosenbaum states:

> Failing grades can lead to social stigma, but failing grades are only slowly acquired; they are sometimes contradicted by good grades; and not being very visible or salient, they become recognized and communicated only imperfectly. In contrast, track position provides a single, highly visible, unambiguous label that instantaneously communicates stigma. (p. 169)

There is some confusion as to whether tracking represents an ascribed or an achieved status. Youngsters in vocational curricula may find themselves in low status positions in the social structure of the school based on aspirational plans rather than achieved criteria.

One of the primary studies which connects tracking to delinquent activities was done by Schafer and Olexa (1971): "Our findings suggest that a key factor in rebellion and 'drift' into delinquency which may be more important than a working-class background is having a non-college-prep status in the school's tracking system, with the low achievement and marginal status that accompany that position" (p. 49).

The Role of the Peer Group

It has long been observed by social scientists that low status youngsters seek each other out for mutual support. Short and Strodtbeck (1965) pointed out the importance of street gangs for the resolution of status problems. Cohen (1955) discussed the ways in which delinquent subcultures helped to solve the problem of frustrated status aspirations for working-class boys. Vinter and Sarri (1965), in their research on "malperformance" problems in school, noted that "...pupils identified as underachieving or disruptive tended to seek each other out and to form associations that reinforced deviancy" (p. 7).

Research on school tracking systems has provided support for the position that the structure of the school may work to create peer networks which provide support for rebellious and delinquent behavior. The school, through tracking, places those youngsters who have the lowest academic status in the same classes. Such social and physical segregation may limit a youngster's chances of meeting students with different academic experiences and chances. Rosenbaum (1976) found that "Virtually all students choose a majority of their friends from their own or the adjoining track and more than 70% of those in each track choose all five best friends from these tracks" (p. 158). The result of this structured peer selection process, according to a number of researchers, is the creation of distinctive subcultures in the school. Schafer and Olexa (1971) have called these educationally supportive and educationally antagonistic subcultures. Hargreaves (1967) in a study of British secondary school refers to academic and "Delinquescent" subcultures.

The point here is that youngsters seek peer-supported solutions for status problems. The structures and decisions of both the school itself and peer groups tend to crystallize social status positions. Low status in school can be a powerful incentive to rebel. High school is the major arena of adolescent life as well as being the official agency of society. When a youngster fails in school we are in effect

saying that he is a failure in society. This failure is not merely a personal or private matter for the youngster since the actions of the adult staff and students take on a public character in high school. School status theories suggest that youngsters engage in rule-violating behavior in response to stigma and failure. One can, however, extend such theories to address the wider issue of the basis of authority in high schools.

Authority in High School

An examination of rebellion against authority in the schools must take place within a broad theoretical framework. It is necessary at some point to ask the most basic question of why youngsters grant legitimacy to school authorities. To assume the legitimacy of academic authority without specifying the underlying basis of such authority may lead to little more than coercive solutions to the problems of rule violation in high school, an approach which has resulted in a surprising number of schools with armed guards patrolling the halls. Such physical control measures may be temporarily effective, but they are hardly a solution, as they are premised on the breakdown of the legitimacy of the institution.

Coercive Strategies

One can answer an inquiry about the reasons that youngsters grant legitimacy to school authority at several different levels. At the most obvious level, youngsters recognize school authority because failure to do so will result in disciplinary action, a bad school record, and ultimately being thrown out of school. The consequences of school disciplinary problems are grave in that the student's record is virtually the only documentation of that adolescent available. As Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) point out, the school is the official agency that police, civic organizations, and agencies go to for a record of the adolescent regarding complaints or problems. The student's record, therefore, has consequences beyond social and academic spheres. It is also the youngster's official biography for the community.

The response above is essentially the rationale for coercive strategies. If you want youngsters to conform to rules you merely raise the costs of nonconformity. The problem with this strategy is that when you lower a youngster's status position in the school he will find alternative sources of self-worth with others whose status is marginal and receive support for rebellious behavior. This is the reason why rebellious youngsters are more likely to smoke

cigarettes, drink alcohol, and engage earlier than other adolescents in premarital sex. There is no longer an incentive to remain an adolescent, and so they seek to create an adult status by engaging in behaviors which are symbolic of adulthood. One result of coercive strategies is to drive youngsters away from the school, and the role of student.

Control Theory

If you turn the argument for coercive strategies around, you have control theory, which becomes, in effect, the carrot side of the carrot and stick metaphor. One makes conformity so attractive that youngsters are unwilling to engage in behavior which results in losses. Youngsters with the most to lose will be the best conformers. "When or whenever he considers deviant behavior, he must consider the costs of this deviant behavior the risk he runs of losing the investment he has made in conventional behavior" (Hirschi, 1969, p. 20). In the most general sense, the manipulation of rewards and punishment may be the process which operates to maintain order, but it is by no means the basis upon which normative conformity is expected.

Rational-Legal Authority

Schools are by law compulsory and, on this ground, rules of conduct are theoretically applicable to all students. That is, at the most basic level, schools rely upon bureaucratic or legal bases of authority. Granted, there are individual teachers whose authority is derived from the personal relationships they establish with students, and communities do set expectations regarding student-teacher relations, but in general the secondary school teacher's authority has a rational-legal basis of legitimacy.

Authority relations in college have also been problematic. However, it would be a mistake to draw parallels between rebellious behavior in high school and college. The basis of legitimacy in college is different in emphasis from that of the high school. The college instructor derives authority not solely from position but from knowledge. He or she has the authority of the expert. While such authority has been and is called into question by those who would challenge the veracity, sources, or relevance of such professed knowledge, such a challenge is nevertheless quite different than that of the rebellious high school student. "With regard to authority, the structure of high school organization remains more hierarchical than the college organization. Authority stems more from position (office) than from expertise" (Parsons & Platt, 1970, p. 14).

High school students have to go to school by law, and, in theory, the rules and regulations imposed on them are uniformly applied to all students and imposed by all school personnel. The person obeying authority does so only in his or her capacity as a student and what he or she obeys are written rules. The exercise of such authority is ideally neutral and impersonal. Matza (1964) referred to this aspect of authority as consistency. He said, "Consistency is the expectation that treatment according to the same principle extends over a category of persons. It is perhaps the most fundamental element of justice" (p. 110). This is not to say that all people should be treated equally, but rather that rules should be applied equally.

The structure of authority in schools was thought to be an extension of the traditional authority of the family. Schools were seen as a transition between the family and the larger society, between traditional authority based on personal loyalty and personal relationships and the more impersonal authority of society at large. This forms the basis of the structural strain model of adolescent rebellion (Eisenstadt, 1956), which focuses on differing role requirements of the family and society. The concept of inequality is a crucial part of the transition from traditional to rational-legal bases of authority. When authority and systems of authority were handed down by tradition, people did not question the inequality or arbitrariness of

the system. Rational authority, on the other hand is premised on the notion of equal treatment based on written rules.

Student Perceptions of Legitimate Authority

The transition of the basis of authority from traditional to rational and the consequent emphasis on equality, i.e., consistency in rules, as youngsters proceed through school is not only theoretically salient; it can also be shown empirically. Piaget (1965), in comparing the principles of obedience and equality, found that 95 percent of 6-year-olds tested opted for obedience over equality when asked to comment on stories incorporating these principles. By age 12, virtually all the youngsters tested rated the principle of equality most important.

Tapp and Levine (1972) investigated children's developing ideas of rules, justice, and compliance in kindergarten through college. They asked open-ended questions such as "What is a rule? Why should people follow rules?" A good indication of the changing bases of authority is found in the coded responses to the question "What is a fair rule?" Primary school youngsters were the only group in the sample to answer this question with the response that all rules are fair. Twenty percent of the primary school sample used this type of reply, indicating that they held

the kind of unquestioning acceptance of rules suggestive of traditional authority. By middle school this type of response had completely disappeared, and the proportion of youngsters who answered the question of rule fairness in terms of equality had risen from 25 percent to 53 percent.

The Connection Between Authority, School Status, and Rebellion

The discussion above of rational authority and principles of equality, or consistency, may seem somewhat removed from the rebellious behavior which began this article. Yet authority, school status, and rebellious behavior are intrinsically connected. The distribution of grades, school status, immediate opportunities for social participation, and future opportunities in terms of career paths creates invidious distinctions which work against the basic notion on which the legitimacy of authority is premised. Allocation born of bureaucratic authority is neutral and impersonal; yet schools award praise, prestige, privilege, and even the physical distribution of monies, goods, and services to students of high academic status.

Youngsters experience the differential allocation of status in school as unfair. Rosenbaum (1976) found that "Most noncollege-track students believe that their track placements restrict their opportunities for participation

and leadership in school activities" (p. 158). There is, however, an enormous difference between unfairness and injustice. One of the central tenets of the academic system is that the distribution of rewards is based on achievement criteria. Even though the correlates of status, especially nonacademic status, are too often ascribed characteristics or occupational aspirations, most youngsters attribute low status to personal failings. Inequalities in the school are interpreted as unfair rather than unjust because of the overriding ideology of achievement. Where youngsters perceive inequality, there is the necessary but not sufficient condition for a breakdown in the legitimacy of authority.[1] Rebellion in the face of authority which is illegitimate may be perceived as just. A low position in the status hierarchy of the school can not only provide an incentive to rebel against authority; it can also provide justification for a rejection of the legitimacy of that authority.

There is a natural connection between adolescent perceptions of illegitimate authority and peer support for rebellious behavior. Matza (1964) has suggested that the peer group serves as a collective memoray accumulating examples of unfairness. These inequities form the basis of the rationalizations formed in the peer group, which allow youngsters

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[1]Rosenbaum (1976) noted that status differentials were salient in his relatively homogeneous sample of blue-collar youth outside of Boston. Yet indications are that perceived inequality is greatest in those high schools with the most heterogeneous student bodies.

to engage in violative behavior. This notion of youngsters "condemning the condemners" was originally formulated by Sykes & Matza (1957) and has since been connected with school status theories (Call, 1965; Polk & Richmond, 1972; Frease, 1973). The connection between the peer group and anti-institutional behavior is that youngsters share their perceived inequalities and form a collective interpretation which defines the school as at fault. The mission of high schools is to encourage success and punish failure. The youngster of low academic status is, therefore, much more likely to perceive failure in personal terms, to blame himself rather than to blame the school. In order for students to assume a critical stance toward the school, they need the justifying rhetoric and support provided by the peer group.

There is a contradiction here in that the interpretation above leads to a more seriously antagonistic position toward school than is supported by the data. While this theoretical position implies a committed anti-institutional stance on the part of youngsters of low academic status, the evidence which follows would indicate that such a stance is a very rare occurrence, even in the presence of peer support. Youngsters may utilize the contradictions in authority relations, as discussed above, to justify rebellious behavior, but there is strong evidence, developed in the later part of this paper, that adolescents, regardless of their behavior, remain committed to the norms and standards of the school.

Sample and Procedures

Data for the present analysis come from a statewide survey of adolescents in Illinois conducted by the Institute for Juvenile Research. A stratified random sample was drawn from the entire universe of 14- to 18-year-olds who lived at home. Interviewing for the sample was undertaken in 40 of 102 possible counties, involving the screening of more than 19,000 households, which produced approximately 3,100 completed questionnaires. The completion rate was about 75 percent, with the remaining 25 percent falling between a relatively small proportion of refusals and a large number of adolescents who could not be contacted after repeated call-backs. The basic questionnaire was self-administered in the household with an interviewer present to ensure the privacy of the respondent.

The measure of rebellious behavior is composed of three closely related items: truancy, bothering a teacher seriously enough to be thrown out of class, and being suspended from school. Using a never-ever cutoff point, the three items form a Guttman scale ordered by degree of difficulty, with school suspension being the least common activity and truancy being the most common.[2] For the purposes of the present paper, only the respondents who are high on the Rebellion Scale are reported. These youngsters have engaged in at least two of the three behaviors.

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[2]The Rebellion Scale has a coefficient of reproducibility of .90 and a coefficient of scalability of .65.

Academic status is measured by a typology which combines academic performance, school program, and academic expectations. Youngsters of low academic status (11 percent of the sample) are those who reported below-average academic performance, those who did not expect to complete high school, and those who were in the college preparatory curriculum and yet did not expect to go beyond high school. The youngsters of high academic status (36 percent of the sample) are those whose academic performance, school program, and expectations would lead to a college degree or beyond. The average category (53 percent) is a residual composed of youngsters who at least expect to complete high school and perhaps go on to college or trade school.

The measure of peer support for rebellious behavior is a single item asking, "How many of the kids you spend time with have ever bothered a teacher seriously enough to get thrown out of class?" Response categories include: half or more (13 percent of the sample), less than half (43 percent), and none (47 percent). The assumption here is that youngsters who report that their friends engage in rebellious behavior perceive peer support for such behavior.

The measure of personal blame for failure consists of two items:

How well do each of the following statements describe you? (very true of me, somewhat true of me, not true of me)

I sometimes feel that I just can't learn.

People like me don't have much chance to be successful in life.

The distribution of the summed scores was divided roughly into thirds. Those who are high on the measure have a low image of their learning abilities. They perceive themselves as failures.

The measure of a critical stance toward the school consists of two agree/disagree items:

School rules are too strict.

Students should have more to say about how the school is run.

As with the other measure, the distribution of the summed scores was divided into thirds. Youngsters who are high on this measure assume a critical posture toward the school.

An ideal choice for measurement of the theoretical perspective described here would be a question about rule fairness in school. While we asked youngsters to comment on how fair their parents were in enforcing rules, we unfortunately did not include a similar item about school rules.

Results

Table 1 shows the relationship of academic status and peer group behavior to rebellious behavior and the two attitudinal measures. The table is actually three separate cross-tabulations and is designed to be read one row at a time. The first row of Table 1 is the percent of youngsters in each combination of academic status and peer group behavior who are engaged in serious rebellious behavior in high school. By a comparison of specific columns one can examine the relationship between academic status and rule violation while holding constant the effect of the peer group and vice versa. To look at peer group influence, controlling for academic status, one can compare columns 1, 2, and 3 (or 4, 5, and 6 or 7, 8, and 9) where peer group influence changes but all youngsters are in the same category of academic status. In similar fashion, a comparison of columns 1, 4, and 7 (or 2, 5, and 8 or 3, 6, and 9) shows the relationship between rebellious behavior and academic status, controlling for peer influences.

The first row of Table 1 shows the percent of youngsters who are high on the Rebellion Scale (that is, who have engaged in serious rule-breaking behavior in high school) for each combination of academic status and peer behavior. On one hand are those youngsters of high academic status who reported having no friends who had ever been thrown out of class.

Table 1

Percent of Youngsters Who Are High on the Rebellion Scale, Personal Blame for Failure, and Critical Stance Toward School Cross-Tabulated by Academic Status and Friends Thrown Out of Class[a]

	LOW ACADEMIC STATUS			AVERAGE ACADEMIC STATUS			HIGH ACADEMIC STATUS			
	Friends Thrown Out of Class			Friends Thrown Out of Class			Friends Thrown Out of Class			
	Half or More	Less than Half	None	Half or More	Less than Half	None	Half or More	Less than Half	None	Base
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Percent High on the Rebellion Scale	85 (73)	47 (138)	25 (115)	50 (240)	28 (678)	12 (698)	43 (87)	17 (483)	5 (524)	(3036)
Percent High on Personal Blame for Failure	52 (67)	41 (127)	44 (110)	38 (230)	31 (645)	25 (670)	27 (86)	18 (473)	17 (513)	(2921)
Percent High on Critical Stance Toward School	33 (73)	20 (138)	11 (115)	30 (240)	21 (680)	9 (698)	30 (86)	14 (483)	8 (524)	(3037)

[a]Numbers in parentheses represent total N for category.

These youngsters are the least rebellious group in the sample. Only 5 percent are high on the Rebellion Scale. At the other extreme are those youngsters who are low on academic status and report that half or more of their friends had been thrown out of class. Whether or not these youngsters have rebellious friends, they perceive peer support for this behavior and in this are revealing much about their own self-images as rule breakers. These are clearly the most rebellious group in the sample: 85 percent of these youngsters were high on the Rebellion Scale. Each category in between these extremes tells of a unique situation for a group of youngsters with regard to school and to their perception of the friends they spend time with. The percent of youngsters who are high on the Rebellion Scale climbs in a regular fashion across categories of both academic status and peer behavior. It can be shown that the basic character of this relationship holds regardless of gender or social class differences (Kaplan, 1976).

One can begin the argument from either side of the table to try and reconstruct what the likelihood is of a youngster engaging in rebellious behavior. The problem here is that all these data were collected at the same time, and so it is not possible to construct whether youngsters who are rebellious choose rebellious friends or whether youngsters engage in rebellious behavior because of peer influence. The truth lies somewhere in between. Because of the tremendous emphasis on grade and age separation in school, youngsters are more likely to have friends of the same age. Eighty-

five percent of the youngsters in the sample responded that most of the kids they go around with are about the same age as they are. Because the peer group is the same age, youngsters experience school and life together, that is, each stage in life becomes an experience unique to the peer group. There are images available to adolescents of rowdy kids or "socies" or "jocks," but the youngster and his or her friends together explore these images as they mature and new roles and new self-images become available to them. It is therefore more likely that these images are worked out within the peer group. This is the concept of peer solutions for status problems that was discussed earlier. It means not so much peer influence as the peer process of resolving self-image. It also means that within the peer group acceptable behavioral alternatives are worked out.

It is apparent from Table 1 that identification with a rebellious peer group is more closely associated with rebellious behavior than is low academic status. The percent difference in rebellious behavior is greater across categories of peer behavior than across categories of academic status. Two categories stand out in making a comparison of the effects of these two variables on rebellious behavior. First, there are those youngsters who are high on academic status and report that half or more of their friends had been

thrown out of class (column 7). Youngsters in this category are in an interesting kind of dilemma. They are successful students who have rebellious friends. This is a sort of classic conflict situation for youngsters. Here, youngsters must choose whether the school or their friends offer the greatest inducement. In this situation, the school wins more often than not. Only 43 percent of these youngsters are high on the Rebellion Scale. However, when one considers that school carries the institutional weight of society as well as the support of parents, that 43 percent figure may be viewed as uncomfortably high.

A second group of youngsters in a particularly instructive situation are those who are low on academic status and report that none of their friends have ever been thrown out of class (column 3). These youngsters aren't doing very well academically; yet, none of the kids they spend time with are rowdy in school. They have an incentive to engage in rebellious behavior but such behavior is not a part of their peer group. Only a quarter of these youngsters are high on the Rebellion Scale. These youngsters are, for the most part, very conventional.

By examining the other two categories of youngsters who are low on academic status (columns 1 and 2) one can see that the peer group has great impact on the kind of behavioral alternatives youngsters perceive. As the number of friends who had been thrown out of class increases, the percent rebellious in each category jumps, first to 47 percent and then to 85 percent. It is apparent, then, that

the peer group influences the likelihood of a youngster breaking rules in high school.

The relationship between peer group and attitudes toward self and school is explored in the second and third rows of the table.

The second row shows the percent of youngsters in each category who are high on the measure of personal blame for failure. These youngsters attribute failure to their own shortcomings. Most of the variation in this row is due to differences in academic status rather than peer behavior. For example, looking only at those youngsters who reported that none of their friends had been thrown out of class (columns 3, 6, 9), one finds that 17 percent of those with high academic status perceived personal blame for failure, as compared to 25 percent of those with average academic status and 44 percent of those with low academic status. However, the peer group is at least somewhat associated with the personal perception of failure. Youngsters are more likely to see themselves as failures when they have rebellious friends. Identification with the peer group is so salient a factor in the youngster's self-image that even the academically successful youngster is likely to view himself as having limited chances for success when his immediate circle of friends are engaged in behavior which challenges authority in the school.

The third row of Table 1 is the percent of youngsters who are high on the measure of critical attitudes toward school. The results indicate that this stance is almost entirely associated with the content of the peer group and has very little to do with the academic status of a youngster. Looking at those youngsters who reported that half or more of their friends had been thrown out of class (colums 1, 4, and 7), 30 percent of those with high academic status assumed this antagonistic posture toward the school, as compared with an identical figure of 30 percent of those with average academic status and 33 percent of those with low academic status. The percent differences across categories of peer behavior are much greater. Of the youngsters high on academic status (columns 7, 8, and 9), only 8 percent of those who reported no rebellious peers were very critical of the school, as compared to 14 percent of those who said that less than half their friends were rebellious and 30 percent of those who said that half or more of their friends had been thrown out of class. Whether or not a youngster evaluates the school unfavorably is primarily the result of support afforded by his or her immediate peers, and only minimally affected by academic failure.

The experience of academic failure is a personal one. Because the distribution of rewards and prestige in school is theoretically based upon achievement criteria, the

youngster in a low status position in the school is likely to conclude that this status is his own fault rather than the school's. The peer group plays an important role in interpreting failure. Within the peer group, the youngster can redefine failure, attributing it to the school rather than to himself, and can find the justifying rhetoric which allows him to engage in rebellious behavior. Table 2 examines rebellious behavior on the two attitudinal dimensions: the extent to which youngsters perceive themselves as failures and the extent to which youngsters assume a critical stance toward the school. There are more reasons for engaging in rebellious behavior than there are ways of being rebellious. Therefore, looking at attitudinal variables it is possible to specify not only the extent but also the type and seriousness of such behavior.

It's clear from an examination of the table that a critical stance toward school is more closely associated with rebellious behavior than is the perception of personal failure. This is a reasonable finding since this peer-supported critical posture provides a justification for turning against academic authority.

At least two different kinds of rebellious behavior are evident here. It is perhaps best to view this as a continuum in terms of the seriousness of the consequences of these behaviors for academic authority.

Table 2

Percent of Youngsters Who Are High on the Rebellion Scale Cross-Tabulated by Critical Stance Toward School and Personal Blame for Failure[a, b]

Critical Stance Toward School	Personal Blame for Failure		
	Low	Moderate	High
Low	8 (504)	14 (538)	17 (311)
Moderate	18 (396)	30 (434)	33 (318)
High	40 (132)	42 (158)	46 (168)

[a]Numbers in parentheses represent total N for category.

[b]Missing = 152.

In the lower right corner of Table 2 are those youngsters who are high on both the measure of a critical stance toward the school and the measure of personal blame for failure. These youngsters have engaged in serious rebellious behavior. There is strong evidence that Matza's (1964) model of neutralization is operating for these youngsters. They justify rebellious behavior in terms of a critical posture toward the school, "condemning the condemners," but they continue to show commitment to the evaluative standards of the school in that they still perceive themselves as responsible for failure. These youngsters continue to support the school's definition of success and failure. This kind of rebellious behavior, while clearly a disciplinary problem for schools, is not a serious threat to academic authority for two reasons. First, these youngsters, through their low self-evaluation, demonstrate that they incorporate the standards and values of the school. Second, their behavior seems explicable. They are the losers striking out against a system in which they could not succeed. There is an encouraging note here: since these youngsters want to suceed, they should be reclaimable if teachers and administrators can devise strategies to provide experiences of success and self-esteem so that these youngsters can begin to define themselves in more positive ways.

On the other side of the table (lower left corner) are those youngsters who are high on the measure of a critical

stance toward the school and low on the measure of personal blame for failure. Forty percent of these youngsters were high on the Rebellion Scale. This category presents two potentially serious threats to the structure of authority in schools. Within this cell are a group of youngsters who are unsuccessful in school and blame the school rather than themselves for failure. Their rebellious behavior is indicative of a rejection of the authority of the high school and, therefore, can have the most serious kinds of consequences for schools. Fortunately, this is a very small group. Only 6 percent of the youngsters in this cell of the table were low on academic status, as compared to 11 percent of the total sample. It is unlikely that schools can have much success in reaching these youngsters since theirs is a more complete rejection of the institutions, representing the withdrawal of legitimacy from authority discussed earlier in this paper.

A second, and in some respects more troubling, group of rebellious youngsters in this category are the academically successful ones. For these youngsters, the school competes with a rebellious peer group and too often loses. However, it may be the case that these youngsters have more leeway in school and the consequences of their actions may be less damaging to their careers because of their high academic status.

Conclusions

School status theories are successful in accounting for disciplinary problems not only because of the stigma which attaches to failure and low status in the structure of the school, but because the system of differential access to privileges and opportunities in school denies low status youngsters alternative sources of positive school experiences and violates the very principles upon which the legitimacy of authority is premised. The peer group serves to collect examples of inequities, thus providing a rationalization for rule-violating behavior, and simultaneously providing an alternative source of self-esteem for youngsters. In this process, schools create both an incentive and a justification for engaging in rebellious behavior.

Most of the youngsters who engage in rebellious behavior in school do not represent a serious challenge to authority. Their behavior is best explained as striking out in reaction to the stigma of failure, rather than as more seriously antagonistic to academic authority. For these adolescents, who represent the bulk of academic disciplinary problems, the present research suggests a number of general policy recommendations.

Any program which reduces failure will aid in the reduction of disciplinary problems, provided it does not result in additional stigmatization for youngsters connected with the program. One of the reasons that alternative

schools have had success is that they provide a new setting for youngsters to experience a positive school experience. Beyond purely academic concerns, youngsters should have other kinds of positive experiences in the school available to them. The structure of rewards and status in schools should be examined and restructured to ensure that all students have a fair chance to share in opportunities and that the principles of allocation and application of rules are consistent across categories of students. Curricula should reflect aspirational choices, not status hierarchies. All students in a school should have access to participation in activities and rewards, not just an elite. Obviously, these are ideal goals but they serve as a starting point for teachers and administrators to examine the structure and distribution of status in their own schools.

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